



U.S. Coast Guard History Program

Active, 1807

New York, New York Master Caleb Brewster

In action: moving; causing action or change.

Builder: Unknown; chartered vessel

Rig: Schooner

Length:

Beam:

Draft:

Displacement: 98-tons

Cost:

Commissioned: 1807 (purchased)

Disposition: placed out of service in 1817, sold?

Compliment:

Armament:

Cutter History:

Cutter: *Active* was purchased rather than purpose built as a cutter and began operations as early as 1807. It remained in service until 1817.

Master: On January 20, 1797, Caleb Brewster received his commission as 1st mate for revenue cutters; and, on July 28, 1801, he received a commission as revenue cutter master for the State of New York. Henry Cahoone, brother of *Vigilant* master John Cahoone, served as first mate. Brewster retired from the service in 1816.

War of 1812 Events and Operations:

June 18, 1812. President James Madison signs a declaration of war and the War of 1812 officially begins. The congressional authorization states "*that the President of the United States is hereby authorized to use the whole land and naval force of the United States . . . against the vessels, goods, and effects of the*

government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and the subjects thereof."

June 18, 1812. Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin sends a circular to all customs collectors, writing only the sentence: "*Sir, I hasten to inform you that War was this day declared against Great Britain*". In a separate circular, Gallatin orders the news dispatched to U.S. naval vessels by revenue cutters stationed at Savannah; Norfolk; Charleston; New York; Portsmouth, New Hampshire; Wilmington, North Carolina; and Wilmington, Delaware.

May 26, 1813. A New York newspaper reports that cutter *Active* braves a "strong south gale" near Montauk Point, Long Island, to maintain surveillance of three British men-of-war about ten miles out to sea. *Active* passes the intelligence by way of small craft to Commodore Stephen Decatur's squadron anchored to the west near Orient Point in Long Island Sound.

June 1, 1813. Caleb Brewster reports on naval operations of Commodore Stephen Decatur's squadron then trapped in Long Island Sound.

June 5, 1813. A New London, Connecticut, resident reports that the enemy's barges "*yesterday towed a sloop out of Four Mile river, laden with flour; also burnt others off Plumb-Island. A very small force, even two or three of our revenue cutters, well manned, might soon put a stop to this business.*"

June 8, 1813. *Active* breaks through the British blockade of New London to join Commodore Stephen Decatur's naval flotilla five miles up the Thames River.

June 10, 1813. A Royal Navy squadron tightens its blockade of the New London flotilla, including USS *United States* (54), USS *Macedonian* (49), USS *Hornet* (20) and cutter *Active*.

July 27, 1813. *Active* arrives in New York escorting an American merchantman from New London. The cutter sailed within sight of the blockading British squadron, but was not chased.

August 2, 1813. *Active* sails from New Haven as escort to a convoy composed of brig *James Monroe*, packet *Juno*, and several smaller sailing vessels. According to the Connecticut *Mirror*, Brewster sailed under the cover of a dark night and enjoyed a fair wind.

August 3, 1813. *Active* arrives in safely in New York with its convoy of New Haven vessels.

December 13, 1813. Crew of *Active* uses the ship's boat to seize a deserted Swedish schooner in Huntington Bay on Long Island.

January 22, 1814. At Sandy Hook, Cutter *Active* detains the cartel ship *Fair American*, bound for Liverpool. Brewster's boarding party finds eleven men with no passports concealed in the ship's hold as well as a large quantity of suspicious papers and documents. According to one newspaper account, several men of wealth were disguised as seamen and certain documents were torn to pieces during the revenue officers' inspection. The newspaper also noted that "*We further learn that two prisoners of war are amongst the men taken out, and a large quantity of letters were found in the baggage (some say 500 and others more) containing draughts, bills, orders, &c. for supplying the enemy on our coast, in Canada and in the West Indies, &c., &c. premising the development of a most nefarious and long continued system of smuggling, victualing the British and contravening the most imperious laws and highest interests of the country.*"

February 19, 1813. Caleb Brewster reports to the local newspaper the latest exploits of USS *President* (55), recently arrived at Sandy Hook, New Jersey.

August 8, 1814. Peace negotiations between the United States and Great Britain begin in Ghent, Belgium.

August 13, 1814. Caleb Brewster reports to New York authorities regarding the British assault on Stonington, Connecticut, and American sloops captured by the enemy in Long Island Sound.

August 19, 1814. Caleb Brewster informs New York authorities about a British squadron sailing off Sandy Hook, New Jersey.

December 24, 1814. Peace treaty (Treaty of Ghent) signed between representatives of the United States and Great Britain at a ceremony in Ghent, Belgium.

January 4, 1815. In response to the destructive effects of the war on commerce, New England delegates to the Hartford Convention claim that "*Commerce, the vital spring of New England's prosperity, was annihilated. Embargoes, restrictions, and rapacity of revenue officers, had completed its destruction.*"

January 8, 1815. Americans defeat a British army in the Battle of New Orleans in the last major land engagement of the war.

February 11, 1815. Under the white flag, HMS *Favorite* (18) delivers the peace treaty, Treaty of Ghent, to New York City.

February 12, 1815. *Active* sent by military officials to notify the British squadron of the cessation of hostilities and pending ratification of the Treaty of Ghent. *Active* fails to locate the warships, which had likely received notification through their own channels of communication.

February 16, 1815. President Madison signs Treaty of Ghent officially ending the War of 1812.

February 25, 1815. Treasury Secretary Alexander J. Dallas issues a circular to all customs collectors regarding future policy in light of the conclusion of the war. In the two-page circular, he instructs, “[cutter] *officers and men must be recommended for their vigilance, activity, skill and good conduct.*” Dallas later directs that “*Smuggling, in every form, must be prevented, or punished. And if it be not prevented, the officers of the customs, according to their respective duties and stations, will be held answerable to prove, that there was no want of vigilance on their part.*” In the final paragraph, Dallas lists other duties to be carried out by the customs officials, hence their respective cutters, including “*immediate measures will be taken, for restoring the light-houses, piers, buoys, and beacons, within your district and jurisdiction, to the state in which they were before the war*”.

March 3, 1815. Congress repeals “*the acts prohibiting the entrance of foreign vessels into the waters of the United States*”, thereby repealing elements of the Non-Intercourse and Non-Importation acts.

May 18, 1815. *Active* sails from Sandy Hook to New York transporting important dispatches from the USS *Constitution* destined for the Navy Department in Washington, DC.

May 30, 1815. Treasury Secretary Alexander Dallas writes the New York customs collector about building one or more schooner-rigged cutters to replace those lost in the war.

Sources:

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